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I. MORE ABOUT CHAUCER'S WIFE OF BATH

I.

He who would enter upon anything like an adequate explanation of the remarkably complex and contradictory character of Chaucer's Wife of Bath must expect heavenly guidance and receive aid from the stars. Though one may not be quite prepared to accept entirely the pronouncement that she "is one of the most amazing characters . . . the brain of man has ever conceived,"¹ still she is so vividly feminine and human, so coarse and shameless in her disclosures of the marital relations with five husbands, and yet so imaginative and delicate in her story-telling, that one is fascinated against his will and beset with an irresistible impulse to analyze her dual personality with the view of locating, if possible, definite causes for the coexistence of more incongruent elements than are ordinarily found in living human beings. Some time ago when I proposed casting the horoscope of the Wife of Bath,² it was with the supposition that rules of natural astrology might be used exclusively in the interpretation of certain data, concerning planets and their influence, which Chaucer has furnished us; but it is not entirely so. In the full presentation of the Wife's "fortune"—her character, personal appearance, and the significance and location of mysterious "marks" about her body—constant reference must be made to what the mediæval mind believed to be truths found in the "science" of celestial physiognomy and perhaps of geomancy.

¹ G. L. Kittredge, *Chaucer and his Poetry*, p. 189.

² 'Chaucer's Reeve and Miller,' *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, XXXV, 207, Note 53. This is the second of a "series of studies advanced in support of the general thesis that Chaucer, in his choice of physical peculiarities that would fittingly correspond to the characters of his Canterbury Pilgrims, made use of, or at least was influenced by, the rules and regulations laid down in the universally popular physiognomies of his time." See also 'The Secret of Chaucer's Pardoner,' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XVIII, pp. 593 ff.

That startling revelation of a woman's experiences in love, the Wife of Bath's Prologue, reaches its climax, I suppose, at the point where Jankin, the unsophisticated clerk of twenty, is selected by Dame Alisoun, aged forty, to fill the recently vacated place and to take up the labors of her fourth husband who has just been packed off to the churchyard. She has wept a little for decency's sake, it will be remembered, and has worn the mourning veil for at least a month out of respect for custom; but her heart has never been in the grave of her husband. Even while following the bier, she tells us, she kept an appraising eye on the shape of Jankin's leg—she always had a "coltes tooth."

Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel;
 I hadde the prente of sēynt Venus seel.
 As help me god, I was a lusty oon,
 And faire and riche, and yong, and wel bigoon . . .
 For certes, I am al Venerien
 In felinge, and myn herte is Marcien.
 Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
 And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardinesse.
 Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars thereinne.
 Allas! alas! that ever love was sinne!
 I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
 By vertu of my constellacioun;
 That made me I coude noght withdrawe
 My chambre of Venus from a good felawe.
 Yet have I Martes mark up-on my face,
 And also in another privee place.³

Now from this passage it appears that, to the mind of Chaucer, the cause of Dame Alisoun's peculiarly contradictory character lies not in herself but in her stars; she is in no way responsible. For at her birth the sign Taurus, one of the "houses" or "mansions"⁴ of Venus, is said to have been in

³ *The Oxford Chaucer*, ed. W. W. Skeat, C. T., D, 600 ff. All further references to the text of Chaucer are to this edition.

⁴ Professor Skeat has already given sufficient explanation of the astrological terminology used by Chaucer: *vide* 'mansions,' *op. cit.*, I, 497; III, 348; 'face,' V, 372, 395; 'term,' V, 395. For his discussion of the conjunction of Venus and Mars in Taurus see his notes on 'The Complaynt of Mars,'

the ascendant over the horizon, hers being what the exponents of natural astrology would call "the horoscope in Taurus." Her dominant star or ruling planet is Venus—she speaks proudly of the wisdom taught her by the love-star (D, 575)—^{4a} which, being posited and at home in its own house Taurus, may be considered "well-dignified" or particularly beneficent in aspect toward the "native." Most unfortunately, however, the combined good influence of the ascendant sign and the dominant star is vitiated by the presence in conjunction of Mars, one of the most "malific" and evil of planets.⁵ Both Mars and Venus—and if one may put faith in astrologers, the sign Taurus—have left their "marks" upon her body as well as upon her character. With one eye upon this constellation and with the other on the mediæval astrological and physiognomical lore, which must have been familiar to Chaucer,⁶ let us read and interpret the Wife of Bath's horoscope.

II.

Mediæval astrologers are exceedingly careful in setting up and in drawing figures of the heavens representing horoscopes in all the various signs of the zodiac. Ioannes Taisnier finds

II, 468; III, 249. See also J. W. Manly, 'On the Date and Interpretation of Chaucer's Complaint of Mars,' *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, V, 107 ff. The other house of Venus is Libra.

^{4a} That Venus is the dominant star in this nativity is suggested by the power which she wields over the native and by the fact that she is further referred to as 'my dame.' And that Venus is situated also in the ascendant sign Taurus—and is therefore in conjunction with Mars—seems certain, because the good Wife has the 'prente of sēynt Venus seel' upon her person; Venus in any other than the ascendant sign would be powerless to leave a mark. See the authorities cited in Note 25.

⁵ For the evil influence of Mars, see Skeat, *op. cit.*, V, 80-2, 149; III, 348. Mars's companion in evil is Saturn, Skeat, III, 349; V, 88, etc.

⁶ Chaucer's immense knowledge of astrology has been pointed out by many scholars: Skeat's notes on 'The Astrolabe'; T. R. Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer*, II, 395 ff.; Florence M. Grimm, 'Astrological Lore in Chaucer,' *Univ. Neb. Stud. in Lang. and Lit.*, No. 2, 1919; A. E. Brae's Introduction to his edition of *The Astrolabe*, etc.

that, when Taurus is just rising *in oriente*, Aquarius is discovered *in medio coeli*, Scorpio *in occidente*, and Leo *in imo coeli*, and shows what particular influence each sign in this position exerts upon the native:

Horoscopus si fuerit in Tauro, ratiocinandum erit in hunc modum, videlicet fore eum hominem laboriosum, anxium, atque varijs dispunctum curis in opibus acquirendis, facilem ad diuitias, & item procliuem ad easdem amittendas, triumphatorem de suis hostibus.

Hunc acceptum Principibus facit in medio coeli Aquarius, atque actibus praestituet & publicis officijs, fortasse etiam negotijs quae ex aquis sunt, quod aquae naturae videtur esse deditior.

Scorpius in occidente cordatum, officiosum, qui vxorem amittet, si masculus sit, sin autem mulier, quae marito & filio priuabitur.

Leo in imo coeli si fuerit, patrimonium vendicabit, quod, non obstantibus omnibus insidijs, et agnatorum conatibus consequentur.⁷

So far one may follow with some confidence the technical directions of natural astrology, but no farther; Chaucer has failed to give data concerning the exact positions of sun and moon, and has not indicated the exact hour of the day—whether morning, afternoon, or night—and the day of the year of the nativity in question, all of which is absolutely necessary. But writers on metoposcopy are not silent regarding the supposed influence of Taurus on women—and men—born under that sign. For example, Philippi Finella says:

Tauro veniente pro ascendente. Erunt valdè magni vultus mulieres, & frontis, cum rudi colore, facies carnosae cum magna in 3 topicis locis linearum copia, & in fronte praecipuè. Nemo ex Zodiaci signis tantas ducit, vt Taurus lineas, quando ascendentis fuerit Dominus, & signum dictum, quando ascendet; mulierem oculos terrentes habentem & capu(t) mouibile, magis à dextra quam à sinistra parte demonstrat. Capilli ad nigrum, & magnum

⁷ *Absolutissimae Chyromantiae Libri Octo*, In quibus quicquid ad chyromantiae, physiognomiae, & naturalis astrologiae perfectionem spectat, continetur, Coloniae Agrippinae, 1563, p. 496. A figure may be found facing the same page. Taisnier is following closely the work of Ioannes Indagine, *Introductiones apotelesmaticae elegantes, in chyromantiam, physiognomiam, astrologiam naturalem*, etc., Lvgdvni, 1556, which see for a like figure and the same interpretation.

tendent; spatulae latae, simulque pectus erit; tardos ducet motus, tamen maxime fuerit labore praedita, & minimè odio illam habebit. Signo praedicto cum prima facie ascendente ducet mulierem libenter amoris dedicatam rebus; virum habebit maioris aetatis sua; in amoribus suis pluries crimine apperietur suorum parentum causa à signabilibus officietur infortunijs, & quia prima facies est in dominatione Mercurij; mulierem instabilem, & de repente volubilem nunciat nunc ad vnum, ad alterum nunc, & quia multum se praeualet in hac secunda facie Mercurius; neuum ei dabit sub nucula colli, versus spatulas declinantem, hoc cum possidebit, felices possunt coniecturari aeuents, si à dextra fuerit parte; verum si à sinistra, iustitiae causa multa possunt praedici pericula, etc. . . . Lineam Venerio, dum iu(n)ctam lineae Martis obserbabit . . . mulierem valdè virilem, sagacem & cum externo esse dandam in matrimonio indicat.⁸

A later writer concerning these matters assures us that "those born under Taurus are of a cold and dry constitution, inclined to melancholy; one that . . . loves pleasure; . . . once provoked, seldom reconciled; of short stature, but well set; short legs, big buttocks, a bull's neck, wide mouth, and black hair."⁹ And the most scholarly of the students of celestial physiognomy, Baptista Porta, reporting faithfully the opinions of Haly, Maternus, and Leopoldus, presents in a passage too long to quote, 'De Tauri formae constitutione, moribus, & physicis rationibus,'¹⁰ much the same conclusions as those cited above.

⁸ Philippi Finella, *De metroposcopia*, Antverpiae, 1648, p. 134. I cannot resist the temptation to give a part of the influence which Taurus exerts upon men: "Cum in ascende(n)te homo signum Tauri possidebit, caput magis rotundum quam longum; eius frons ad magnitudinem potius quam ad paruitatem inclinabit . . . Nasus aliquantulum latus apertis cum narieibus valdequè latae vt plurimum eius capilli erunt nigri, aut ad nigrum vergent; . . . bonus erit loquutor in loquendo, & talis erit, minimè non claras reliquens rationes, erit animosus; magis mendacium, quam veritatem celebrabit; superbus, luxuriosus, narratorque fuerit. Illi, ad quos Tauri ascendit signum, valdè loquaces homines sunt, & eorum opinionibus valdè sunt dediti," *ibid.*, p. 134. Ordinarily the predictions made concerning men may be applied with equal truth to women.

⁹ Erra Pater (*pseud.*), *The Book of Knowledge*, Boston, 17, p. 14.

¹⁰ Ioannes Baptista Porta, *Coelestis physiognomoniae libri sex*, Neapoli, 1603, p. 116. (Compare also Battista della Porta, *Della Celeste Fisonomia*, Padoua, 1627.)

Still fuller and far more detailed are the prognostications which may be made with certainty regarding the physical form and the disposition of those so fortunate as to be born when Venus, posited in either of her two houses, Taurus and Libra, is the ruling star in a nativity. Unfortunately I have not had access to the works of astrologers who lived and wrote before the time of Chaucer, but Baptista Porta quotes, apparently with painstaking accuracy, the opinions of Haly and others whom the English poet may have been acquainted with. In a passage headed 'De Veneris forma ad Astrologis descripta,' Porta says:

Maternus: Venus geniturae domina si fuerit effecta, dat corpus longum, candidum, oculos gratos, venustatis splendore fulgentes, spissos capillos, aut moliter flexos, aut gradata pulchritudinis venustate componit, aut crispis crinium facit. . . . Hali: Venus similis Ioui, nisi quod ex peculiari quodam beneficio ei contingit esse formosiozem, ac maioris venustatis, melioris conceptionis, & pulchrioris formae, quoniam formositatem significat conuenientem formositati mulierum, et est magis mansuetus, & corporis blandioris, & proprie oculi eius sunt inter Zarchum & nigrum, & pulchrum. Aliqui dicunt, quoniam aliquantulum bazus cum rubidine mixtus, debilis, pulchri aspectus, nigredo oculorum suorum maior albedine, subtilium superciliorum, ac iunctorum, & subtilium labrorum, multae carnis in facie, angusti pectoris breuium costarum, crassorum crurium, blandi aspectus, & saporosi, pulchrae faciei. . . . Messahala dicit: Hominem album declinantem ad aliquam nigredinum, & ex inde quorum nigredo aliquid maior, quam in aliis reperitur, tamen decens pulchros capillos, faciem rotundam, non tamen magnam, neque maxillas. Dorotheus dicit, hominem facere pulchram faciem habentem, pulchros oculos, quorum nigredo erit plusqua, apparens, pulchros capillos & multos, crassiem, album & rubore infectum. Abdila dicit: Venus pulchros facit capillos, pulchra supercilia, in eundo se nulliter gerit, aut aliquid agendo, mediocris staturae.¹¹

¹¹ *op. cit.*, p. 61. To this imposing array of ancient opinion may be added Finella, *op. cit.*, p. 27; Taisnier, *op. cit.*, p. 493; *Les Oeuvres de M. Jean Belot*, Lyon, 1654, p. 235; Rosa Baughan, *The Influence of the Stars*, London, 1889, p. 26; William Lilly, *Christian Astrology, modestly Treated of in three Books*, London, 1659, pp. 85, 265; Jean de Indagine, *Chiromance & Physiognomie* (trans. Antoine de Moulin Masconnois), Lyon, 1549, p. 279; Ioannes Fredericus Helvetius, *Amphilheatrum physiognomiae medicum*, Heydelbergi, 1660, p. 79, and the same author's *Microscopium physiognomiae medicum* Amstelodami, 1676, pp. 87-91—all of whom are in more or less amplified agreement with Porta and his authorities.

Nor does the same author leave us in doubt as to the exact disposition and character of the person born when Venus reigns well-dignified and undisturbed by evil influences in the ascendant sign, Taurus. In the section called 'Mores, quos Venus largiatur' he continues:

De Veneris moribus loquens Hali dicit: Quando Venus fuerit significatrix spiritus nati, seperatim & per se, & fuerit in bono statu, procreat natum quietum, mansuetum, bonum, minime vitiosum, lympidum, bonarum cogitationum, is amat saltare, & est magnus Zelotypus, rixas abhorret, amator magis, teriorum, subtilium operum, bonae formae, bonorum signorum, veridicorum & bonorum somniorum, facit se diligere ab hominibus, factor boni, pius, bene dat, & bene accipit, foelix, et communiter maior pars suae voluntatis erit in causis mulierum. Maternus: Venus facit homines delectabiles, laetos, assiduo luxui vacantes, amabiles, gratos, venustos, amatores, libidinosos, iustos, pios, apud quos integra & incorrupta amicitiae vicissitudo permaneat, potu multo gaudentes, ac paruum cibum sumentes; omnes cibos facile digerunt, qui semper venereos coitus, et crebro cupiditates ardore desiderant, in omni vita nobiles, & mundi, et quorum vita, animus et institutum musicis semper delectationibus inhaerescant. Tum balnea, suci, odorataque opobalsama, gratia, iocus, camenae, in chorumque locupletatus applausus. . . . Significat etiam conuiuia, ientationes, dulciaque tragemata, siue bellaria, et quicquid sapore dulce, ac volupe est. . . . Cantores & lepidos facit, omnes amicos habent . . . pietatis, & misericordiae studiosissimi viuentes ociosè, & delicatè, delectabitur muliebribus ornamentis vtetur ornamento sui corporis pulchris indumentis, & mundis. . . . Erit homo ludi, risus alacritatis & gaudii, libenter delectabitur societatibus, comestionibus, et potationibus confidens aliis, & saepe deceptus. Erit largus, & supit audire sonos, erit suavis moribus, bonus auricus . . . beneuolus, dulcia & mollia effudit verba, dulcissima habet eloquia. . . . Corporis & sui vultus studiosissimus, pulchris figuris delectabitur, & odoribus, facile ad fletum pronus, ob id et misericors.¹²

To this significant passage may be added a pertinent excerpt from the four full pages which Helvetius presents upon the same subject:

Libenter peregrinantur, ut nationum exoticarum fruantur favore; vestes amantundas & ornamenta albi, caerulei, nigri etiam coloris aut opere

¹² *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65. Compare also like accounts by Helvetius, *Amphilh. physiog. med.*, p. 79; Taisnier, *op. cit.*, p. 493; Lilly, *op. cit.*, pp. 85, 265; Baughn, *op. cit.*, pp. 53, 55; and Finella, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 36.

Phrygis parata ex auro, argento & gemmis ad cultum corporis, profacultatum suarum ratione; . . . in amoris tamen exercitatione saepius excedit modum, & ad exhibendum in occulto officia promptissima sunt admodum fervidi atque flagrantis. . . . In conjugio admodum est variabilis & praecipue quando non lautè sustentatur, & sanè saepius in delectatione feliciore esset, si tot dies valedictionis seu divortii darentur quot in amore percepto numeravit. Nam sua accepta suavi perficit amoris actiones simulque Amphiboliis utitur jocosis, ad animos amantium ad redamandum subtili calliditate fascinandos.¹³

And still further items may be gleaned from Indagine's account of the influence of Venus when she dominates in the roots of natures of phlegmatic¹⁴ natures:

Venus fait l'homme follatre, & rageux, inconstant, ioyeux, paillard, beau, ayment & craignant Dieu, iuste; . . . il sera grand beuveur, musicien, ioueur d'instruments & chantre. Et aymera les arts qui font manuellement, comme peinture & autres choses qui sont faites proprement & sans ordure.¹⁵

I have ventured to give at considerable length these prognostications regarding the influence of Venus in Taurus, because in any correct interpretation of Chaucer's Wife of Bath it is necessary that one realize what she might have been. Such a fascinating personal appearance and attractive disposition might have been assured her at birth¹⁶

¹³ Ioannes Fredericus Helvetius, *Microscop. physiog. med.*, pp. 91-95. The quotation is taken from p. 95.

¹⁴ It is a well-known astrological fact that Venus is found only in roots of natures of phlegmatic natures: "Pour Venus elle ne se trouve qu'en la natiuité des Flegmatique . . . la fille née en cette constellation garde peu son pucelage, s'il se rencontre qu'elle soit camuse, ce qui est le plus souvent," *Les Oeuvres de M. Jean Belot*, p. 235. The Wife of Bath is, therefore, of a phlegmatic nature.

¹⁵ Jean de Indagine, *op. cit.* (trans. Antoine de Moulin Masconnois), p. 279.

¹⁶ It may be of interest to observe how the above conclusions are confirmed and strengthened by reference to the principles of geomancy. Skeat has already explained how fortunes may be determined by the use of geomantic methods (*op. cit.*, V, 82-83; *The Academy*, March 2, 1889; cf. *The Saturday Review*, Feb. 16, 1889; it is necessary here only to point out that the figure which he calls Puella (p. 83) and to which he assigns—quite errone-

had not fate—or perhaps her creator—decreed that she should sink in the scale by virtue of the malignant influence of the war-planet, Mars, at that time in conjunction with Venus. At the conclusion of a long discussion of the beauty and charm of one born under the dominion of Venus, Indagine says: “Si Mars entre dedens occultement, il change lesdites choses en cauteles, paroles vaines & menteries, & aux choses qui sont de sa nature.”¹⁷ Let us consider, therefore, the power and nature of Mars.

All the writers on these occult matters, whom I have consulted, agree with convincing unanimity that Mars, either in his own houses or in those of the other planets, is a powerful worker of evil. Finella remarks ‘De Martis horae dominio’:

Quando Mars primae praefecerit horae, & si Taurus Ascendens interbitauerit, nimiae natum lasciuiae, & incestuositatis infamia flagrantam palescet, siquidem cui mulieri nubit, prius cognouerit, quam plura ex falsitate cum damna, tum proditioes degustabit, & haec vt plurimum propter mulieres;¹⁸

ously—the zodiacal sign Libra, is the geomantic “figure” of the Wife of Bath and corresponds to the sign Taurus. (The other figure of Venus is Amissa, corresponding to the sign Libra, her other house). The following interpretation is given by M. Belot: “Alors qu’il se rencontre *Puella* ou *Amissio*, qui sont les deux maisons de Venus, l’une representent Taurus, & l’autre (Libra) au sort des points, ils nous representent l’homme ou la femme Venerienne; s’ils sont nés, ou s’il se rencontre *Puella* ou Taurus en leur ascendant, ils sont d’une couleur pure, & le corps massif, nitide, beau, pur, net & sans macule, les levres grosses, eminentes, particulièrement la supérieure; ils sont d’une stature petite; ils ont la face belle, les cheveux longs, non crespus, blandides, les yeux grands,” *op. cit.*, p. 249. Le Sievre de Pervchio also remarks: “La fille (i. e. *Puella*) exterieurement, promet du bien, de la ioy, du profit, & de l’honneur; ce n’est pas que la personne soit exempte de luxure, d’inceste, ny de scandale, car même elle sera sujette aux querelles, & à faire des ennemis. Mais elle se plaie d’ailleurs aux saveurs douces, aux odeurs fâcheuses, aux jardins, aux bastimens curieux & portiques . . . Ses louables moeurs luy promettent bonne fortune; telle personne estant officieuse, oaisible, plaisante; rusée, pourtant auare, & même cruelle & impudique,” *La Chiromance, la Physionomie, et la Geomance*, Paris, 1657. p. 228 (cf. also p. 241).

¹⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 279.

¹⁸ *op. cit.*, p. 233.

Porta in his discussion of Mars in the various zodiacal signs quotes Haly¹⁹ and Maternus as follows:

Hali. Mars in tertia facie Tauri, est formae mirabiliter turpis, abhominabilis vultus, iocatores diligit, hilaritates, cantiones & citio. Maternus. Si Mars in Tauro fuerit inuentus, erit homo turpissimi, foedissimique aspectus, iocisque, ioculationibus continue deditus, etiam edax, temerarius . . . hacque de causa infoelicitate plurima defaticabitur;²⁰

and Taisnier, adding further harrowing details, is in substantial agreement:

Cum Mars fuerit . . . in domo Veneris . . . erit natus luxuriosus, fornicator, perpetrans scelus cum vxoribus consanguineorum suorum, vel cum suis consanguineis, vel desponsabit mulierem, cum qua antea moechatus est, & patietur detrimentum á mulieribus. . . . Si vero in Taurus extiterit, significat omnem luxuriam & malitiam coniunctam.²¹

Still, one is delighted to learn that the case of phlegmatic natures is not so desperate as that of the melancholic and the coleric:

Mars est mal situé en la natiuité dun flegmatique; il fait lhomme roussatre, ou iaunatre, de petite & soudaine nature, fort, auentureux, grand babillard & menteur. Et nest laspect de Planette quelconque que ce soit, se doux & valable, que sil ha vne fois le dommaine de lenfant né, il ne iette & exerce toute sa malice sur luy. Il brusle les cheueux au sommet de la teste, & fait la face large, & engrossit le chef; il fait aussi lhomme cruel, & regardant de trauers, fort courageux, & hardy, alaigne & bien delibere; soudain, annuyeux, & facile a se courroucer, grand babillard, vanteur & glorieux, traytre, fier & arrogant, . . . controuueur de noises, pilleur, batteur de gens, tuer de ses pere & mere, digne destre battu, & secret annuieux de ses amis. Neantmoins il fait toutes les choses susdites plus doucement en la nature flegmatique qu'en celle du melancolique, ou colérique; & ce pour cause que lhumeur flegmatique escume & reploidit la chaleur.²²

¹⁹ Since this article was written I have been able to verify these quotations from Haly. See Albohazen Haly, filii Abenragel *Libri de iudiciis astrorum*, Basileae, 1551, pp. 12, 170 (Mars), p. 165 (Venus). This is Ali ibn Abi Al-Rajjan an Arabian physician and astrologer of the eleventh century. Porta's citations are correct. He has also been faithful in his copying from Maternus; see Firmicus (Iulius) Maternus, *De nativitatibus*, Venetiis, 1497, sigs. d1, f6.

²⁰ *op. cit.*, p. 147. Cf. also Helvetius, *Amphilh. physiog. med.*, pp. 71-87.

²¹ *op. cit.*, p. 615. Cf. also Helvetius, *Mocroscop. physiog. med.*, p. 45.

²² Iean de Indagine, *op. cit.*, p. 278. Compare also the account of M. Belot (*op. cit.*, p. 233), which concludes with the remark that "cette nature est fort vicieuse."

Thus the influence of Mars, situated in Taurus or posited at all in the nativities of phlegmatic natures, is evil enough; but when he happens to be in conjunction with Venus the situation is, according to Guido Bonatus and Cardan, indeed deplorable:

(Aphorism) 14. He that has Mars in his ascendante shall be exposed to many dangers, and commonly at last receives a great scar in his Face (p. 9). When Mars is Lord of a Woman's Ascendant, and Venus is posited in it, or Venus is Lady of it, and Mars in it . . . 'tis more than probable she will Cuckold her Husband (p. 13). 69. When Venus shall be too powerful in a Geniture, and in places of the Infortunes (i. e. in conjunction with Mars, for example), inconveniences are to feared from unlawful Loves (p. 19). 95. If in a Woman's nativity Mars shall be under the Sun Beams, she will be apt to play the Harlot with her Servants and mean fellows; but if Venus be there, then she will trade discreetly with nobles and Gallants of Quality.²³

And William Lilly has it that "Mars with Venus denote the Wife full of spirit, movable, an ill House-wife, prodigall, and that the native is or will be an Adulterer."²⁴

Not all the astro-physiognomical material that may aid in the correct interpretation of the Wife of Bath's constellation has been presented, however, until some explanation has been offered of the mysterious 'prente of sēynt Venus seel,' located somewhere about her person, and of 'Martes mark' which is found upon her face and 'also in another privee place.' What is the nature of these 'marks,' and exactly where are they placed? It is a marvelous truth, we are told by the celestial physiognomists,²⁵ that every human being has printed upon

²³ Guido Bonatus, 'Choice Aphorismes of Cardan's Seven Segments,' in *Anima Astrologiae, or a Guide for Astrologers* (trans. William Lilly), London, 1683, pp. 9-33, *passim*.

²⁴ Christian Astrology, p. 595. Cf. also Baughan, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

²⁵ This paragraph is a free translation of the exposition given by M. Belot (*op. cit.*, pp. 219-221) except that I have omitted his irrelevant illustration which takes up the Sun and certain other planets in conjunction in the sign Aries. For further discussion of natural marks and moles see Lilly, *op. cit.*, pp. 149, 155; Le Sievre de Pervchio, *op. cit.*, p. 104; M. H. Cardan, *La Metoposcopia*, Paris, 1658, p. 220; Richrd Saunders, *Physiognomie and Chiromancie, Metoposcopia, Dreams, and the Art of Memory*, London, 2nd ed., 1671, Introduction to the section on Physiognomy; M. de Mirbel,

his body, at the hour of conception or perhaps at birth, the 'mark' of at least the ascendant sign and of the dominant star which are supposed to rule his fortunes. These marks are found in those parts of the body that are referred or 'attributed' to the various signs and planets; and whether they are placed before, behind, or to the right or left side depends upon the 'face'²⁶ of the sign just appearing above the horizon. If there should be another planet in conjunction, moreover, and if the Sun should be in the ascendant, then the native will have an additional set of marks on those parts of the body which correspond to these stars. Thus it comes about that a person may have four marks—each one of which may possibly be duplicated in another place. The mark of the ascendant sign, it must be observed, is always the highest, that of the Sun lower—if he happens to be rising—, that of the dominant star still lower, and that of the planet in conjunction lowest of all.

For example, the Wife of Bath's horoscope is in Taurus, but Chaucer has unfortunately neglected to inform us as to which face of the sign was in the ascendant at the time of her birth. We may locate, therefore, the mark of this sign somewhere on the neck, but whether it is on the throat, or on the side, or on the nape of the neck cannot be determined. M. Belot says in this connection:

Quand la personne est née au signe du Taurus il a la marque au col; si c'est á la premiere face, que les Arabes nomment *Adoldaya*, elle est en la gorge en forme d'une fraissette, ou vne petite tasche rouge ou piste d'un pied de chat, celle lá est mauuaise. Si la personne est née en la seconde partie, qui est depuis dix iusques á vingt, la marque est a un des costez du col, ayant la forme cy-dessus, si c'est qu'il ne soit né en la troisième partie, la

Le Palais du Prince du Sommeil, ou est enseignée L'Oniromancie, Autrement L'Art de Devinir par les Songes, Lyon, 1670; and my article in *Pub. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, XXXV, pp. 204 ff.

²⁶ Each sign of the zodiac is divided, for astrological purposes, into three equal parts: from one to ten degrees is called the first face, from ten to twenty the second face, and from twenty to thirty, the third face. Cf. M. Belot, *op. cit.*, p. 221; Skeat, *op. cit.*, V, p. 395.

marque est derriere le col, mais elle est souuent en maniere d'une petite bulbe ou loupe. Au dessous de ces marques sur le bras senestre est celle du Soleil & celle de la planete dominante vers l'endroit qu'elle regit & gouverne.²⁷

Since there is no indication in Chaucer's text of the relation of the Sun to the Wife of Bath's constellation, one may safely conclude that she has escaped being branded on the left arm by that planet. But, as we have seen already, she is marked with the print of Venus's seal. If one may credit Le Sievre de Pervchio, "Venus . . . imprime a l'homme quand elle est en son ascendant, vne marque rouge sur le bras gauche; c'est vne espece de cicer, chargé d'une petit vermeil, qui le decore;"²⁸ or according to M. Belot, who differs slightly from the opinion of Pervchio, "Lorsque Venus domine, ces marques sont aux reins, testicules, cuisses, ou bien au col, á raison de Taurus sa premiere demeure qui regit cette partie; les formes de ces marques sont bulbes ou marques plates, de couleur violette ou blanchastre, qui ne signifient que lasciuité."²⁹ On the whole, I am inclined to think that M. Belot is the more trustworthy authority and to accept his location of the mark of Venus, especially so since all of the astrologers and physiognomists agree in attributing the secret parts of the body to that planet. Nor is that all; the good Wife has Mars's mark somewhere in her face and—because, as I have shown elsewhere,³⁰ every mark

²⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 221. Cf. also Pervchio's additional information and interpretation: "La teste du Taureau constellation celeste, domine au milieu d'Auril; sa marque est imprimée au col, en forme d'une tache rouge, denotant la naissance en cette saison la. Elle represente l'homme courageux, honneste, & doué d'humeur louable; il est pourtant colere & lascif, ayant bonne couleur, les cheveux longs . . . Le Coeur de Taureau preside a la fin d'Auril, imprimant sa marque au dessous du col . . . La queue du (Taureau) domine au commencement de May, auquel temps naissant ceux qui ont sa marque derriere le col," *op. cit.*, p. 110; and Baughan, "When Taurus is rising at a birth, the native bears a mark in the front of the throat; sometimes in the form of a raspberry or red-coloured mole, which mark is always ill in its effects," *op. cit.*, p. 184.

²⁸ *op. cit.*, p. 107.

²⁹ *op. cit.*, p. 225.

³⁰ *loc. cit. supra* (note 25).

or mole on the face is certainly reduplicated in the corresponding part of the body—also in another 'privee place.' M. Belot says:

Si c'est Mars estant dominateur, ces marques sont en ces parties du costé droit, & le plus communement en la tête aux parties deuant (i. e., in the face, though one cannot be sure as to the exact position), ou bien (he might have said "*et bien aussi*") au petit ventre, proche les parties honteuses, ou aux aisnes. Ces marques sont rouges ou purpurées, le plus souuent grandes comme roses, ou gouttes de vin, ou comme verruées, en couleur comme fraisettes, ou cerises.³¹

It should be quite apparent by this time that Chaucer, the artist, considered it necessary only to make suggestions, in connection with the constellation in question, concerning certain planetary marks, being confident that his educated and cultured—from the mediæval point of view—hearers or readers would instantly understand their exact nature, color, shape, size, and location.

III.

Chaucer's Wife of Bath is not merely a "typical woman of the middle class"³² or a type representing the mediæval shrew, as some have supposed, nor is she entirely created out of scraps and fragments from *La Vieille* and *Le Jaloux*,³³ two figures found in *Le Roman de la Rose*; she is, I believe, the living embodiment, both in form and in character, of a conflict in astral influence. That she herself is aware—and makes capital—of this conflict started within her

³¹ *op. cit.*, p. 223. Cf. in addition Le Sievre de Pervchio: "Sa marque est en forme de verruë au petit ventre, aux parties honteuses, & sur les reins," *op. cit.*, p. 106.

³² R. K. Root, *The Poetry of Chaucer*, p. 231. Cf. Ten Brink, *History of English Literature* (trans. Robinson), II, p. 126.

³³ W. E. Mead, 'The Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale,' *Pub. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, XVI, 388 ff. It must not be supposed that my theory is presented in opposition to, or with any idea of supplanting, these illuminating studies. One needs to consider all of these influences, traditional, literary, and astrological—together with others if they may be discovered—in interpreting fully the Wife of Bath's complex character.

nature at birth is suggested by her somewhat pitiful lamentation:

For certes, I am al Venerien
 In feline, and myn herte is Marcien.
 Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
 And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardinesse . . .
 I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
 By vertu of my constellacioun.

Instead of having the naturally beautiful and well-proportioned figure—stately and tall, plump but not stout, graceful, with white skin touched delicately to pink—which should have been hers under the free, beneficent influence of Venus, she is endowed by Mars with a stockily-built, ungraceful form of medium height. That strength which should have accompanied the grace and beauty of body has been distorted into a somewhat repulsive fecund energy. Her hips are large.³⁴ In place of the attractive face—round but not too large, with finely chiseled features, resplendent black eyes and delicately arched eyebrows, and with a lovely peach-bloom complexion set off by thick, curling hair of a dark shade—which Venus might have given, she has inflicted upon her by the malignancy of Mars a heavy, fat face characterized perhaps by coarse features and certainly by a suspiciously red or florid complexion.³⁵ Her voice, which should

³⁴ Skeat, *C. T.*, A, 472. The physiognomists are agreed in the significance of large hips. M. Angellus Blondus says, "Verum coxae carnosae, fortis, audentis, atque superbi animi testimonium. . . . Ac protensa coxendicorum ossa, uirilitalis signum ni mollis caro contingit," *De cognitione hominis per aspectum*, Romae, 1544, p. XV; Rudolphus Goclenius agrees: "Coxarum ossa duriter eminentia, & exterius apparentia, virilitatem monstrant," *Physiognomica et chiromantica specialia*, Hamburgi, 1661, p. 93. Cf. Porta, *De humana physiognomonica*, Hanoviae, p. 249; Rases and others in *Scriptores physiognomonici*, ed. R. Foerster, II, pp. 172, 217, etc.

³⁵ 'Bold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe,' says Chaucer (*C. T.*, A, 458), which indicates, as I have already shown (*P. M. L. A.*, XXV, p. 197), that the man or woman is immodest, loquacious, and given to drunkenness. Cf. Goclenius, *op. cit.*, p. 63; Indagine, *op. cit.*, p. 134; Saunders, *op. cit.*, p. 197, etc. Let no such woman be trusted!

have been sweet, low, and well-modulated, is harsh, strident, and raised continually, as one might expect, in vulgar jest and indelicate banter.³⁶ And the Love-star might have given her small, sharp teeth, white as alabaster and evenly set in gums like coral;³⁷ Mars is responsible for the long, spike-like teeth, set far apart with gaps between, which she possesses. Unfortunately the good Wife is 'gat-tothed.'³⁸

³⁶ C. T., A, 474ff. The Wife's voluptuous and luxurious nature is especially betrayed by her voice. Porta says, "Asperae vocis viros luxuriosos iudicarem, & ad hircos referrem, qui luxuriosi & asperae vocis sunt," and continues with the following explanation: "Vox ceruis maribus tempus coeundi est, rauescere tunc ficticia voce dicitur. . . ; cum libidinantur mares, feminas ad coitum vocant, siue elato capite gutture plena, siue ad teiram demisso. Raucentes tunc ololygones vocantur," *De humana physiog.*, p. 249. One has suspected for a long time that the Wife of Bath knows only too well how to 'laughe and carpe' in fellowship with the most dissolute rakes among the Pilgrims. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that her physical characteristics and her disposition correspond in a remarkable way with the 'Signa mulieris calidae & quae libenter coit' given by the physiognomists. Says Michael Scotus: "Signa autem calidae mulieris & quae libenter coit sunt ista: Iuuentus; completis annis duodecem; sit ad minus semel corrupta; mammas habens paruas; et illas conueniter plenas & duras . . . Cuius pili sunt grossi & asperi . . . ; audax in lingua; in luquendo vox subtilis & alta; in animo superba . . . ; boni coloris in facie; recta in hasta; . . . ebriosa . . . ; cantat libenter; circuit loca; & delectatur . . . ornatibus suis, si ea potest habere," etc., *Liber physiognomiae et procreationis*, Venezia, 1477, cap. IIII. Cf. also Marc Vulson, *Traité de la Physiognomie*, Paris, 1660, p. 12; Lilly, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

³⁷ Helvetius has it: "Dentes sunt exiles, acuminati, alabastro aemuli albo, arcté juxta se invicem dispositi in pulchra, sana, corallina-rubra gingiva; duo tamen incisores superiores aliquantum sunt lati & prae aliis elati," *Microscop. physiog. med.*, p. 89.

³⁸ C. T., A, 468; D, 603. I have accepted, it will be observed, Skeat's rendering (*op. cit.*, V, 44) of the phrase 'gat-tothed,' *gap-toothed*, rather than that of other commentators, namely, *goat-toothed*, i. e., lascivious, though Skeat's interpretation (*loc. cit.*) is more interesting than convincing. As to the physiological interpretation of 'gap-toothed,' there seems to be a division of opinion. Porta is somewhat exercised over the fact that his authorities associate rare—i. e., far apart—teeth with a weak body and a short life, especially so since he finds that many men with rare teeth, Augustus Cæsar for example, have lived to be over seventy years of age and in good health (*op. cit.*, p. 224). He finally comes to the conclusion, however, that

Not less remarkable than this distortion of the Wife of Bath's body is the warping of her character which results from the Venus-Mars conjunction in Taurus. One may still find traces everywhere of the Venerean disposition—never essentially evil or vulgar, but *inclining* sometimes to be so—intensified or turned awry and metamorphosed by Martian influence into a caricature—or even into something quite the contrary—of what might have been. The children of Venus, as we have already seen, are naturally of a happy, joyous disposition, amiable and therefore charming and universally attractive, delighting in the dance and in all forms of innocent amusement, but with all that characterized by a gentleness, a refinement, and by a calm dignity which results in an intense hatred of brawls and strife of any description. They are religious by nature, just in their dealings with men, leaders of noble lives, and—this is most important—of an artistic temperament which expresses itself in an appreciation of song and instrumental music, in a love for delicate and pleasant odors, and which revels in the

earlier writers probably had reference to *small, slender, short* teeth set far apart; in the case of *strong, long, sharp* teeth similarly placed, one must give a different interpretation. Now if the Wife of Bath had been born under the influence of Venus alone with teeth *exiles, acuminati* (note 37) and far apart, one might have offered the following explanation: "Dentes parui & debiles in opere, & rari & curti, significant hominem debilem, boni ingenij, tenerae capacitatis, mansuetum, legalem, fidelem, secretum, timidum, vitae brevis, & ad vtraque conuenientem," Taisnier, *op. cit.*, p. 466. Cf. also Scotus, *op. cit.*, cap. LXVIII; Indagine, *op. cit.*, p. 127; Le Sievre de Pervchio, *op. cit.* p. 152; and Bartholomaeus Cocles, *Physiognomiae et chironomantiae compendium*, Argentorati, 1533, cap. XV. But since she has come under the strengthening influence of Mars, one may safely accept the following interpretation of 'gat-tothed': "Cuius dentes acuti, longi, rari, & fortes in opere, significant hominem inuidum, impium, gulosum, audacem, falsum, infidelem, & suspiciosum" (Porta, *op. cit.*, p. 225), or perhaps this: "Cuius dentes sunt grossi, & lati, siue declinent foris, siue intus, siue sint rari, siue spissi, significant hominem uanum, lascium, grossi nutrimenti, cito credentem, simplicem, fallacem, & mendacem," Cocles, *op. cit.*, cap. XV. Cf. Scotus, *op. cit.*, cap. LXVIII; Taisnier, *op. cit.*, p. 466; Porta, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

colors of elegant wearing apparel and in precious jewels. Being tender-hearted, bountiful and benevolent, they are particularly happy in their social intercourse with people of culture and with those who have a taste for the artistic. Endowed with the warmest and most affectionate hearts, they are lightly prone to violent *amours* with the opposite sex, though it must be observed that their amatory relations need not of necessity lead to vice; they may be pleasure-loving and even voluptuous by inclination without being sensual or lustful, passionate without being touched by wantonness, and full of a consuming—and perhaps entirely human—desire without a trace of licentiousness. Their nature demands that variety of scene and the spice of exotic life which comes only through travel in foreign countries and through the association with peoples of unlike customs and manners.

Such a woman the cloth-maker of Bath might have been. But how different! The natural cheerfulness of her disposition resolves itself into a sort of crude and clamorous hilarity, an overflow of superabundant animal spirits, which makes of her a *bonne vivante* and a fitting companion for such tavern revelers as the Pardoner and her fourth husband. Her religious instinct has been debased to the extent that she goes to vigils and to preaching for the sole purpose of showing her finery and arousing the envy of less fortunate women as she parades first to the offering, or that she attends miracle plays and follows the routes taken by devout pilgrims to the shrines of saints in order that she may satisfy an idle curiosity or perhaps find another lusty husband. The artistic temperament which should have been hers has been cheapened and coarsened by the influence of the War-star, so that she flashily decks herself out in gaudy colors—in scarlet dresses and hose, to say nothing of brand new shoes and silver spurs—and adorns herself with coverchiefs weighing ten pounds surmounted by a hat as large as a buckler. Even this strikingly overdressed woman shows a certain feeling, all the more pitiful because it is uncultivated

or perverted, for the beautiful; she is at least delightfully neat and trim for her time. But worst of all, Mars has played havoc with the luxurious impulses—the ‘likerousnesse’—which come from her mistress, Venus; she has always had a ‘coltes tooth.’ In the Prologue to her tale she appears little more than a healthy and frank female animal—human, to be sure, but for all that the more repulsive—whose dominating idea is the glorification of fleshly lust and the gratification of physical desire. Mars has given her a ‘sturdy hardinesse’ and a body so full of ‘ragerye’ that even at the age of forty she is still ‘faire and yong and wel bigoon.’ She has married five husbands at the church door—besides other ‘compayne in youthe’!—, has enjoyed them with varying degrees of animal pleasure, and has laid them to rest after their marital labors were ended. Welcome the sixth; eight would be all too few. With the most brazen and shameless lack of modesty she reveals her experiences abed omitting neither the feigned appetite, which secures for her whatever funds she needs for the decking of her person, nor the disgusting love-making—an excellent example of misdirected tenderness—with which she wins the services of her three old husbands. She is not so much a restless wanderer as a gadder about in search of excitement—until her fifth husband puts a stop to her going and her gossiping for a season. And it is Mars who impels her to gain at all costs the dominating power over her husbands and who makes of her a wrangler, a chider, and a striker of blows until she attains her purpose. Truly, whatever one may say of Venus’ influence is turned into the opposite when Mars is discovered in conjunction. So the Wife of Bath appears in the Prologue to her tale: a fair Venerean figure and character imposed upon and oppressed, distorted and warped, by the power of Mars.

No one must suppose, however, that this worthy woman is entirely depraved; after the worst has been said, she still has Venus for her mistress. Everybody knows that, even in the Prologue to her tale, she is pursued by the melancholy conviction that the type of life she has led is not the best

possible; her laughing and carping—and perhaps her coarseness is in part but a mask to hide the bitterness which has been forced upon her by an unholy constellation. She knows better, at least, and still has the grace to cry,

Allas! allas! that ever love was sinne.

Consequently there need be no occasion for surprise when we come to her tale to find that her creator, not only a genius but the most sympathetic of men, should have lifted the veil for a moment from the secret places of her nature and should have permitted her to tell a story of the most delicate beauty and grace. It is an artistically woven tale of faery,³⁹ centering, to be sure, about the Wife's original contention that women should have dominion over their husbands but none the less imaginative and free from the slightest touch of vulgarity, and containing a long and nobly expressed sermon on the nature of what constitutes true 'gentilesse' of heart and life. So excellent a critic as Ten Brink, not understanding the artistic side of her character and finding therefore something dramatically inappropriate in such sentiments from the lips of a clothweaver, is moved to say: "The thoroughly sound moral of the long sermon given by the wise old woman, before her metamorphosis, to her young, unwilling husband, comes more from the heart of the poet than from the Wife of Bath."⁴⁰ But it is not so; both the story and the sermon may be considered as highly characteristic of the unfortunate teller.

Professor Root gives, with a remarkably keen and sympathetic insight into the complexities of the character under discussion, a more or less correct description of—though not the "key" to—the whole contradictory situation. "I conceive of the Wife of Bath," says he, "as endowed originally with strong passions and vivid imagination, with what we are wont to call the poetic temperament. Had she been born in

³⁹ For a discriminating appreciation of this story *vide* Lounsbury, *op. cit.*, III, 418; Root, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

⁴⁰ *op. cit.*, II, 163.

a palace, she might have become your typical heroine of romance, her inevitable lapses from virtue gilded over with the romantic adornments of moonlight serenades and secret trysts. But born heiress to a weaver's bench, there was no chance for her poetic imaginativeness to develop. Laughed at by others for her fine-spun fancies, she would certainly grow ashamed of them herself. I can believe that her excessive coarseness of speech was originally an affectation assumed to conceal the natural fineness of her nature, an affectation which easily became a second nature to her. Her strong passions demanded expression; and denied a more poetical gratification, and quite unrestrained by moral character, they expressed themselves in coarse vulgarity. It is only when called upon to tell a story, to leave the practical every-day world, in which she is forced to live, for the other world of fantasy, that the original imaginativeness of her nature finds opportunity to reveal itself."⁴¹ Precisely! The key to her character, however, lies in the fact, as I have already indicated, that the fineness and delicacy which finds expression in the story is but the resurging, as it were, of the artistic Venerean impulse, an outcropping of the poetic temperament which somehow has been kept, subconsciously no doubt, pure and untainted from the blasting and warping influence of Mars. Or perhaps she has faithfully guarded as a kind of sacred possession this love of the beautiful, which no one about her could understand; perhaps in moments of world-weariness she sought this fairy realm of the imagination given to her by her mistress, and found refuge for a time from the coarseness inflicted upon her by the War-star. The unsatisfied yearning for that gentility and nobility of character which might and should have been hers, but for the power of an evil planet, is pathetic; the struggle which has kept unmarred a bit of her original nature in the midst of sordid conditions of life and in the face of adverse circumstances is

⁴¹ *op. cit.*, p. 239.

heroic. The poet may, after all, have considered her his most tragic figure because—as is certainly the case—she is the most nearly completely human.

In conclusion, it must be observed that if the material presented in this study comes anywhere near establishing the thesis contended for, then an entirely new light has been thrown upon Chaucer's manner of constructing character and upon his method of artistic workmanship. Critics have pointed out that in creating many of his figures he borrowed freely whatever material he needed from other writers, or that occasionally he drew his characters according to prevailing literary fashions or perhaps to represent common social types. This is undoubtedly true in some instances. But one must remember that Chaucer was probably a close observer of human nature himself, an original thinker, a creator, a *scoop*, so to speak. He was, moreover, well versed in the philosophy and especially in the sciences of his day: he knew medicine⁴² with no small degree of accuracy; metoposcopy, geomancy and both natural and celestial physiognomy were familiar to him; and he was steeped in what passed for astronomy and in natural astrology. Being continually exercised over the problem of foreordination and apparently believing to some extent in the influence of the stars upon the affairs of men, he has, in the case of the Wife of Bath, assumed the prerogatives and the responsibilities of a creator, setting up carefully a horoscope, producing a human being to be ruled by it, and amusing himself—perhaps like some other Creator—with the inevitable actions and emotions of his living creature. The result is the strikingly vital and complex personality of a woman both blessed and cursed by the stars.

WALTER CLYDE CURRY

⁴² Cf. Lowes, *Modern Philology*, XI, p. 391; Emerson, *ibid.*, XVII, p. 287. In my next article I shall show that Chaucer's diagnosis of the Summoner's malady and the prescription which he suggests might be effective in the cure of it are, from the point of view of mediæval medical men, accurate and correct.